



San Luis Obispo County Drug and Alcohol Advisory Board

BINGE DRINKING Position Statement *Adopted December 8, 2005*

Target audience: 1) Policy makers; media editorial boards; leadership.
2) General public

The SLO County Drug and Alcohol Advisory Board recognizes that alcohol is a drug whose use can lead to some of our county's most serious problems, including addiction, death by overdose, accidental injuries and fatalities, physical and mental illness, lost work productivity, broken families, child abuse and neglect, violent crime, suicide, and birth defects. Binge drinking is defined by the Harvard School of Public Health as drinking 5 or more drinks in a row for men and 4 or more drinks in a row for women and engaging in this behavior at least once in a two week period. Binge drinking is a serious problem among both adults and youth in SLO County. Both in 2001 and in 2003, the CA Healthy Kids Survey of school aged youth enrolled in schools in SLO County showed that 32% of 11th graders in 2001 reported binge drinking 30 days prior to being surveyed. This decreased to 30% in 2003, but these numbers are still alarmingly high. Additionally, when comparing rates of adult binge drinking in SLO with other CA Counties, SLO ranks among the most high-risk counties with rates at least 56% higher than the state average. Every citizen of San Luis Obispo County ought to be aware of the dangers of consuming this drug, and should also take steps wherever possible to prevent binge drinking and its often-tragic consequences. To that end, the Board recommends the following:

The San Luis Obispo Drug and Alcohol Services Advisory Board believes that together we need to develop specifically tailored strategies to address this issue. Employing available risk data as a start, and using what we know about local problems and resources, we believe we can work to reduce the negative effects on the people we love and on our quality of life. Our recommendations for policy makers, youth and youth advocates, administrators, communications experts, and prevention specialists include the following:

1. We must recognize that alcohol is a problem, assess its scope and confront the reality. Many data resources that define risk indicators are available, and these should be the starting point for examining the local problem.

2. Policy is key to developing risk-free environments, and leadership from policy-makers is critical. Policy leaders across the social spectrum are encouraged to communicate the message that, "Binge drinking is not tolerated here".

3. Solutions are community issues - everyone has a responsibility. This means involving youth and local coalitions in seeking solutions. Nonetheless, in SLO, binge drinking is an adult as well as a youth issue. Adults need to remember their critical role as role models for youth.

4. People need accurate information and opportunities for education. DAS will serve as a resource for the community on this issue, and we recommend taking additional advantage of the local expertise to be found in other agencies and individuals.

5. We recommend that the rights of non-binge drinkers be identified and supported. This will help eliminate community suffering from "second hand" effects such as noise, litter, traffic crashes. We also recommend broad support for alcohol-free activities and entertainment, along with communication of the idea that entertainment does not need alcohol.

6. We support community norms for non-binging, and encourage agreement on a code of conduct that is strictly enforced.

7. Problem drinking, including binge drinking often occurs in high-risk environments. These include areas of the community where alcohol-related infractions occur, where there is a high density of alcohol outlets, and where there is a high rate of public nuisance complaints. These environmental factors need to be addressed.

8. The Advisory Board recommends active discouragement of conditions that promote binge drinking such as "happy hours", late hours of sale, gas station mini-marts that sell alcohol, and high-density alcohol-related businesses near colleges.

9. For both humanitarian and practical reasons, the community should offer ongoing encouragement to problem drinkers to seek treatment/help.

10. The DAS Advisory Board recognizes that binge drinking and alcohol abuse can be particularly harmful to women. The mixture of alcohol and inexperience puts people in grave jeopardy for sexual assault. Acquaintance rape is one of the most salient health issues for women on college campuses. Nationally, one of 10 female frequent binge drinkers reported engaging in nonconsensual sex while under the influence of alcohol. We recommend high profile educational campaigns regarding this problem.

Additional Points:

A. Four of five underage drinkers get their alcohol from older students, yet significant law enforcement time, energy and prevention resources are spent on combating fake IDs.

We believe it is more prudent to implement policies, activities and attitudes that reduce this "social source" availability.

B. Drinking alcohol is a low-cost alternative when young adults are looking for social activities. We encourage the examination of the distribution of liquor outlets and the pricing practices in the neighborhoods around them, particularly in neighborhoods where there is a high density of students or young adults. The associated information can then be used in a process of dialogue and concerted action with community leaders to reduce the impact of this problem.